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INTELLIGENCE REPORT

SUBJECT: Castro's Attitude Toward Rapprochement with
the US

This memorandum is based primarily on a review of Fidel Castro's public speeches from May 1970. Each speech was examined specifically for Castro's statements concerning the US. These statements were compared for consistency and to determine the existence of definitive trends.

Summary

In October 1962, Fidel Castro specified that before relations could be normalized the US must: lift the economic blockade, end "pirate" attacks, cease subversive activities, stop reconnaissance overflights, and vacate the Guantanamo naval base. In recent years, he has referred consistently to only two of these conditions: the blockade and Guantanamo. At the same time he has added new stipulations, such as his insistence that the US abandon its "gendarme" role in Latin America and pay indemnification for damages caused by the US embargo.

During the past nine years there has been a perceptible evolution in Castro's public attitude toward the possibility of improved relations with the US. This change can be separated into three observable phases.

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--From early 1965 to August 1971, Castro categorically rejected the possibility of any deal with Washington. His adamant stand was underscored by the extensive use of derogatory rhetoric denouncing the US and especially the Nixon administration.

--In November 1971, Castro stated--for the first time in years--that improved relations were possible, but only after the Nixon administration was succeeded by a "realistic government."

--Since December 1972, however, Castro has stated that an arrangement is attainable with the present administration, but only if certain conditions are met.

Castro has not personally addressed this subject since last May, but a formal statement issued by the Cuban Foreign Ministry on January 10, 1974, reiterated his stance. Since the promulgation of the statement, there have been signs of Cuban interest in a possible change of US policy. Prior to the American Foreign Ministers Meeting in Mexico, a Cuban diplomat in Mexico City told a US Embassy official that Secretary Kissinger's remarks at the conference would be examined carefully by the Cuban Government. He strongly implied that Havana would respond positively to a US initiative aimed at easing the impasse, but repeated the standard Cuban line that the US must take the initiative.

In addition, Cuban media have been rather restrained in their treatment of the US in recent months. President Nixon's State of the Union address was reported by Havana domestic radio with relative moderation. Official analysis of the President's press conference on February 25 was even milder. So far there has been no definitive reaction by Havana to the Secretary's meeting with the Latin American Foreign Ministers, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Cuban ambassador reportedly believes that Secretary Kissinger achieved his objectives at the conference. The Cubans probably attribute the

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lack of any confrontation to the recent US agreements with Panama and Peru. These agreements may have been interpreted in Havana as signs of an increased US willingness to accommodate the Latin Americans and may have prompted the Cuban diplomat's questions concerning a possible US policy change toward Cuba.

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May 1970 - August 1971

Because of the failure to harvest 10 million tons of sugar in 1970, that year was a turning point for many of the policies of the Castro regime. Consequently, the speech in which Castro announced that the goal would not be met was selected as the starting point for this review.

Castro's speech on May 19, 1970 was ostensibly made to denounce the kidnapping of several Cuban fishermen by a Miami-based exile organization. Castro used the incident to incite public wrath against the US and then announced that the harvest would not meet its goal. He repeated his familiar litany of the many sins perpetrated by the "Yankee imperialists" against Cuba but reserved his most vituperative language for President Nixon:

"...the fascist and treacherous mentality of Mr. Nixon, who also brings back Mr. Adolf Hitler....No matter how much Mr. Nixon reminds us of Hitler...."

Castro has compared President Nixon to Hitler on only a few occasions when he has been especially infuriated with the US. He is fully aware of the impact of such language on US attitudes toward Cuba. In this speech he did not even raise the issue of improved ties with the US.

After his admission of failure again on July 26, 1970, Castro sharply reduced the frequency of his speeches and made no significant reference to the US again until April 19, 1971--the tenth anniversary of the defeat of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Befitting this occasion, he made his adamant stand crystal clear:

"...the Yankees...have no right or basis to dream about any type of normalization of relations with Cuba and conciliation with Cuba."

Fidel then quoted from President Nixon's press interview of April 16 regarding the requirements for a change in US policy toward Cuba. After quoting the President's remarks Castro gave a direct response:

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"Now they almost seem to pine for a gesture from Cuba. But such a gesture, Mr. Nixon...will never be made....We can afford to scorn relations with the imperialist US government."

Fidel repeated his total rejection of any reconciliation with the US in his annual speech on July 26 and again on August 27 when speaking to representatives of the World Federation of Democratic Youth and the International Union of Students:

"There is no way to explain clearly enough that we do not want to be involved in this reconciliation chit-chat....We have nothing to negotiate with the imperialist government of the US....We have no interest in any rapprochement with the imperialist government of the US."

In this speech, Castro added--for rhetorical purposes at least--another dimension to his discussion of the blockade. Instead of merely rejecting the possibility of reimbursing US companies for property seized during the early years of his government, he contended that the US would have to pay Cuba for damages caused by the sanctions:

"We have nothing to negotiate with the imperialist government of the US. Debts to the imperialist government?....We will never pay even a symbolic penny....It is not we who owe them, it is they who owe us--for the immense material and human damage that they have caused us with their blockades and economic aggressions...."

Castro's intention in raising this new twist may have been to underline even further his adamant opposition to a rapprochement. However, he has not alluded to this demand again.

October 1971 - October 1972

On October 30, 1971, Premier Kosygin left Havana after a brief visit to Cuba. It is not known whether he raised the subject of US-Cuban relations with the

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Cuban leadership, but a definite change in the official attitude became apparent less than a month later during Castro's trip to Chile. In a news conference prior to his departure from Chile, he discussed the subject at length.

Reporter: "Did you not say that there is a possibility of improving relations with the US?"

Castro: "Yes....We said clearly that while that country's government assumed the role of policeman in the world and reserved the right to intervene...in any Latin American country, we had no interest in improving relations with the government. I want to clear this up. Because it is a very important matter....We would wait until there emerged in the US...a realistic government which understood that that country no longer has the...conditions...to continue its role of world policeman....Then, with that government, we could have relations under honorable conditions."

Castro, in a subsequent speech, stated that his requirement for a "realistic government" disqualified the Nixon administration. Nevertheless, for the first time in years, he had stated that a rapprochement was theoretically possible. He maintained this general formula for several months, even in the speech on December 22, 1971 when he defended Cuba's seizure of two US-owned merchant ships that he said had been used in "pirate raids" against Cuba.

The bomb attack on a Cuban commercial office in Montreal brought a temporary suspension of this theme. At the closing of the second Congress of the Young Communists League, Castro angrily denounced the attack.

On May 1, however, prior to his departure for a trip to Africa, Eastern Europe, and the USSR, Castro again returned to the theme of a "realistic government."

Nevertheless, Castro became deeply embittered by the US blockade of Haiphong and bombing of North Vietnam. Frustrated by the subsequent inaction of the socialist

bloc, Castro used his annual speech on July 26 to deliver his most abusive attack upon President Nixon to date:

"This is why a fascist like Nixon can be president of the US....We are sure that some day it will become perfectly clear how alike Nixon and Hitler are, and how similar Nixon's crimes in Vietnam are to the crimes committed by fascism in Europe...."

Although he did not revert to his previous stand that rapprochement was impossible, he again rejected any "deal" with the Nixon administration:

"Our position is very clearly the following: We limit ourselves to unconditionally demanding that they withdraw from the Guantanamo base, that the blockade end, and that the subversive activities also end. That is our position and it is not debatable....Cuban and US relations cannot improve as long as the United States assumes the right to militarily intervene in any Latin American country....US relations with Cuba will not take place whenever Nixon wants them....There will be no political deals with the Cuban revolution....We simply say that Cuba's doors have been completely closed to the politicking and trickery of Mr. Nixon."

This speech contained Castro's last specific comparison of President Nixon with Hitler. He raised the requirement for a "realistic" US government only once more--in a speech on October 13, 1972.

December 1972 - May 1973

Two months later--at a rally organized to honor President Allende--Castro's general position again changed. The requirement of a "realistic government" was dropped, indicating that an improved relationship with the Nixon administration had become possible. Furthermore, there were significant changes in the conditions outlined by the Cuban leader. Instead of listing several conditions to be met before relations

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could improve, he talked of a two-phased rapprochement. The two stages were clearly separate and each had specific conditions.

The first phase--the initiation of direct talks--required a single precondition, the termination of the economic blockade:

"On July 26, we clearly stated in the name of our people what our opinion was and we ratify it today...as long as the economic blockade of Cuba remains we will not enter into discussion...the first thing they have to do before speaking a single word with us is to cancel unconditionally the economic blockade."*

The remaining conditions were apparently subject to negotiations.

The second phase--resumption of diplomatic ties--presumably would be possible once the remaining issues such as Guantanamo, overflights, exile raids, subversive activities, and US actions in Latin America had been resolved in the negotiations. In this speech, Castro alluded only to US actions in Latin America as a subject to be discussed in these negotiations. The fact that he mentioned no other conditions generated speculation in the US press that he had softened his position, but he clarified his stance on May 1, 1973:

"When Comrade Allende visited us, we explained that the Guantanamo issue was not the main matter in our mind, but that the common problems of Latin America were. We said then that whenever we had to talk with the US it would be about Cuban-Latin American problems first of all, and that

*Castro's reference to his July 26 speech is not correct. His conditions were far more numerous and he explicitly rejected any arrangements with the Nixon administration. See the quote above from that speech.

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Cuban relations with the US could not improve as long as the US insisted on creating a gendarme power in Latin AmericaWhat we wanted to say was that the Guantanamo base was not basic. This does not mean that we have ceased to demand its return.

"There cannot be an improvement in relations between Cuba and the United States as long as the US continues to exercise sovereignty over Latin America, while it continues to police the rest of this continent. This is the main problem....We say quite clearly that we will not discuss anything with the US while the blockade continues. If they want a dialog, they must unconditionally end the blockade first....Whenever we get down to talking we will not be talking about the problems of Cuba, but about the problems of Latin America before anything else. These are the two positions of the Cuban revolution."

Fidel maintained this line for several months but he has not specifically addressed the problem of US-Cuban relations since May 1973. Nevertheless, a formal statement issued by the Cuban Foreign Ministry on January 10, 1974 repeated his demand for termination of the blockade before direct talks could begin:

"It is hardly necessary to repeat that prior to the moment the US Government decides to initiate some official exchange concerning these problems, there would have to be an unconditional lifting of the blockade against Cuba. Cuba will not accept discussions under any other conditions."

The statement also provided Havana's most detailed explanation to date of the necessary steps for better relations:

"Once the blockade is lifted, discussion of the differences between Cuba and the US would have to begin with the willingness of the US representatives to admit that

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the United States does not have any right to intervene directly in affairs related to the sovereignty of Latin American nations.*

"Although the Guantanamo Naval Base lacks strategic importance as far as Cuban national defense is concerned, the problem of its removal would have to be the main point of any bilateral dialog between the two nations.

"Cuba would not allow these discussions to include any problem that would infringe the right of our independent and sovereign nation to conduct its foreign policy...in a manner that best suits its national interest."

Three of the original five demands--reconnaissance overflights, exile raids, and subversive activities--are not mentioned in the statement. The fifth condition--Guantanamo--is described as the main issue of any dialog but the wording suggests that an immediate return of the base is not required.

Thus, during the past four years, there has been a gradual evolution toward greater flexibility in Castro's attitude toward improving relations with the US. Nevertheless, he has given no signal that Cuba is ready to make significant concessions, and the Cuban Government continues to insist that the US make the first overt move by terminating the blockade.

A combination of several factors has apparently generated this change. Soviet pressure probably has been the principal cause. In Moscow's eyes, a resolution of the problem would enhance its policy of detente.

*The Cuban media have not yet reacted to Secretary Kissinger's statement in his press conference of February 23 in Mexico City: "I stated in my opening address two things that should be kept in mind. One, the US will not interfere in the domestic affairs of its sister republics, and secondly, what we say here counts."

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Moreover, elimination of the blockade would probably reduce somewhat the high cost of supporting the Cuban economy. The Soviets evidently do not feel that a rapprochement between Cuba and the US would reduce Moscow's influence upon Cuban decision-making.

Castro may have been persuaded to reduce his adamant opposition to rapprochement with the US by a Soviet promise of full support--included in the joint Soviet-Cuban communique issued following Brezhnev's visit to Cuba--for the ending of the blockade and the removal of the Guantanamo Naval Base. In addition Castro probably received strong assurances of continued economic and military assistance.

Although Castro has often used the blockade to explain many of his own economic failures, he may now believe that the benefits to be gained from its removal outweigh the loss of a valuable propaganda issue. For example, he could portray US termination of the blockade as a major victory for the Cuban revolution. It would also facilitate Havana's efforts to develop trade ties with Western nations, particularly in Latin America.

The Cuban leader probably is motivated also by a need to make the Cuban position more acceptable to other Latin American nations. By moving away from his inflexible and adamant position, Castro may hope to shift the blame for the impasse to the US. The Havana media's constant emphasis on Cuba's alleged role as the wronged party has evoked some sympathy in Latin America.

Furthermore, Castro's new line was probably influenced by his growing confidence in the viability of his government. The stability of his personal position is demonstrated by his willingness to undertake four foreign trips in a three-year period. There are some signs that the Cuban economy is at last making gradual progress. Castro is especially satisfied with Cuba's successful expansion of ties with other countries in the hemisphere. Seven Latin American and Caribbean nations now have full diplomatic relations with Havana, and several others are expanding ties on a lower level. Most of all, Castro takes great pleasure in pointing to the increasing failure of the US-supported isolation policy.

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Finally, the Cuban leader may view the recent US agreements with Panama and Peru as indications of a US willingness to accommodate the demands of the Latin American nations. In his eyes, such a trend could seriously undercut his oft-stated assertion that only a unified Latin America--preferably led by Cuba--could force meaningful concessions from the US. He may feel that he has lost the initiative at the very time that the US has become responsive to Latin American interests.

On the other hand, Castro sees a close parallel in the legal foundations of the Canal Zone and the Guantanamo Naval Base and he probably is impressed with the extent of the progress already made in the canal talks. He is also aware that the US-Peruvian settlement on nationalized properties resolved problems that are comparable to some of those involved in the Cuban-US impasse. The claims against Cuba for the nationalization of US properties in 1959-1960 are still outstanding. Castro therefore may believe that now is the most opportune time for Cuba to extract concessions from Washington.

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